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## CSB Convocation 2018

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Good morning! I want to extend a special welcome to President Mary Hinton, Terry Dolan, Dr. Check, Prioress Sr. Rudolph, Sr. Nohner, and Wendy Iteghete. To those students, faculty, monastics and all members of the community returning, welcome back. To those of you who are new, welcome to the community that is St. Ben's and St. John's. The first day of the new academic year is always one of one of my favorites. There is a scent on the air that indicates that, while not here yet, fall is just around the corner. The campus has come alive with the sounds of excitement as everyone prepares for a new year out of the silence of summer. And I am filled with equal parts trepidation and exhilaration. We are at the start of your journey. And at the beginning we have tradition. You're experiencing one of them now with this Convocation. It is a tradition where you not only join this community, but all community constituents acknowledge and affirm our commitment to you.

I want to ask you a question. Take a minute to think about your answer.

1. Why are you here? You can take that to mean why are you at CSB/SJU or more generally why are you at a residential, liberal arts college. Or any other interpretation of that question you have.

Pause

Now I'd like you to introduce yourself to someone nearby. Preferably someone you don't know already and share some of your answers. Go on. I'll wait.

Pause

I won't ask you to share answers with the entire auditorium. I will, however, share some responses from recent Bennies and Johnnies.

To get a job; To get into graduate school; It's something to try; To be a well-educated person; I cried when I came to campus; My parents are alums who made me look at the school and then I couldn't imagine going anywhere else.

Regardless of the reason, you chose to become a part of this community. And St. Ben's or St. John's chose you just as deliberately. You are at the start of a journey but whatever challenges, successes, and failures you face in the coming weeks, months, and years, this will always remain the community you chose and that chose you.

A community gives people a sense of shared identity and the total is greater than the sum of its parts. This shared identity matters because it takes the group beyond individual, 1 on 1 relationships and turns strangers into trusted peers through a proximity effect: even though I don't know you, I trust you more than the average person because we are part of the same community, we share the same identity. This trust unlocks collaboration, support, safety, hope and much more. While most organizations in the world optimize their performance toward external goals, communities optimize trust. Your professor, your roommate, a classmate, a resident assistant, a sister, a monk – we are the people who look out for one another and encourage you to become the best version of yourself. This community is an emotional place we were will help you discover your academic adventure and individual needs.

Most of you are taking courses with little or no prerequisites, but a certain breadth and depth of character is absolutely essential to succeed here and in life. While I have your attention for a few more minutes, I'm going to share the 6 I find most important.

1. **Passion.** If you are not passionate about your subject, if you view your education merely as a collection of hurdles to clear and grades to be awarded, you have come to the wrong place. Without passion, the virtues that follow are a train with no engine.
2. **Generosity.** Think of your time here as the itinerary for a great expedition, each course a trek on that journey, and each class as an expedition party. The trail will be hard going at times, but we are a community committed to one another. We fail or succeed as a group. Prepare to give of your time, your insight, and your passion so that we all may receive.
3. **Curiosity.** Ask “Why?” and “How?” at every opportunity. Let wonder lead the way. About one week ago, an article in the New York Times discussed advice for college through interviewing recent Mitchell Scholars. The Mitchell Scholarship promotes partnerships between the U.S. and Ireland by paying for post-graduate study by U.S. students in Ireland. The single most important aspect of college according to these scholars? Relationships with faculty members. To quote Azza Cohen, a documentary filmmaker who graduated from Princeton in 2016, “In the routine rush to finish our assignments, sometimes the breadth of the surrounding intellectual force field slips our minds”. Take advantage of the unique and varied individuals here. Ask the question that seems crazy. Utilize office hours of faculty and administrators to discuss connections between your interests and passions. We love to discuss ideas! It is likely you will never live in such a curious community again. Take advantage of it.
4. **Determination.** You will get stuck. You will flounder. Greet every doubt and every obstacle with a smile and fresh resolve. Adopt a growth mindset for your intellectual development. According to Carol Dweck, the psychologist who coined this term, those with a fixed mindset believe their basic qualities such as intelligence or particular skill are fixed quantities. On the other hand, those with a growth mindset believe that these basic qualities can be improved through dedication and hard work, and when they fail at something, they take it as a learning opportunity and get better by learning from their mistakes.
5. **Accountability.** You are responsible for your own education. The opportunity to solidify your chosen future is placed here before you, commit to seizing it. *Discere faciendo*. To learn is to do. But doing requires going – to class that is. It is the least you can do, but still is one of the best predictors to outcomes. When I was in high school, I thought I might become a musician. That summer, I attended a music camp. For 5 weeks, I played 3-4 concerts every week, went to 3-4 rehearsals for said concerts every day, and was required to attend an absurd number of concerts as an audience member. That’s all I did. I never practiced. I notoriously brought books to concerts to read rather than pay attention. And a strange thing happened. I improved. By simply doing the minimum amount of work, I got better. The next summer, I went again. And this time I practiced as well. I asked crazy questions of my teacher on everything from artistic interpretations to ways to decrease injury. Again, I improved. I improved enough that began playing in a professional orchestra. So, go to class. It’s the least you can do. But to be better? Be engaged both in and out of the classroom. Go to events around campus. Be purposefully curious.
6. **Optimism.** The slate is wiped clean. Whatever your past successes and failures, focus now on the present. Believe that it is possible for one place to forever change the course of your intellectual life. Believe that this is that place.

So, as you go about your day, stop for a moment and notice the scent on the air indicating that fall is just around the corner. Hear the sounds of campus humming with community members filled with equal parts trepidation and exhilaration. Welcome home and have a wonderful year.